

Voices of Victimization: A Phenomenological Study of High School Students in South Punjab

Sabahat Nawaz

sabanawaz42@gmail.com

PhD Scholar Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan

Sarwat Sultan

drsarwat@bzu.edu.pk

Professor Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: * Sarwat Sultan drsarwat@bzu.edu.pk

Received: 24-08-2025 Revised: 23-09-2025 Accepted: 15-10-2025 Published: 27-10-2025

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study investigates the multifaceted experiences of victimization among high school students in South Punjab, Pakistan. Using comprehensive focus group accounts, the study revealed fourteen interconnected themes, including ridiculing names and labels, social isolation, revenge, teacher bias, psychological withdrawal, and digital victimization. The findings highlight how victimization is profoundly ingrained in peer dynamics, teacher practices, family influence, economic inequities, and, increasingly, digital platforms. This study emphasizes the critical need for culturally appropriate interventions, teacher training, and multi-level solutions to reduce the psychological and educational harm caused by widespread victimization. The implications for policy and practice in low-resource situations are explored.

Keywords: *victimization, high school students, peer dynamics, teacher bias, South Punjab, phenomenology*

INTRODUCTION

Victimization in schools remains a major concern around the world, with serious consequences for students' psychological health, social integration, and academic progress (Smith et al., 2002; Espelage & Holt, 2001). In Pakistan, particularly in underserved areas such as South Punjab, little qualitative research has shed light on students' lived experiences as they navigate these hostile circumstances. This study explores these experiences using a phenomenological lens, with the goal of indirectly capturing students' voices through detailed parental narratives and unraveling the complex interplay of peer, family, teacher, and institutional elements that perpetuate victimization.

Victimization encompasses a wide range of harmful behaviors that can occur in a variety of contexts, including physical, emotional, sexual, cyber, economic, institutional, peer, and hate crime victimization. Physical victimization is the use of physical force to cause injury, such as assault, bullying, or domestic abuse, and it is typically the most visible kind of victimization (Olweus, 1996; Finkelhor et al., 2009). Verbal abuse, intimidation, and gaslighting are all forms of emotional or psychological victimization. These behaviors have an impact on an individual's mental health and can lead to long-term issues such as anxiety and low self-esteem (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Sexual victimization is defined as nonconsensual sexual acts or behaviors, such as sexual harassment, assault, or exploitation that can have serious psychological and physical consequences (Koss et al., 1987).

Cyber victimization happens on digital platforms and involves cyberbullying, online harassment, and identity theft, which can cause severe emotional anguish and social isolation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

Economic or financial victimization occurs when someone is exploited financially, such as through theft, fraud, or forced labor, and can result in material and emotional misery (Payne & Gainey, 2006). Institutional victimization happens within organizations or systems when policies or practices hurt individuals, such as discrimination, neglect, or abuse of power by authoritative figures (Finkehor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994). Peer victimization refers to harm committed by people of the same age group, such as bullying, social exclusion, or relational hostility, and it is especially widespread in schools (Olweus 1996).

Furthermore, discriminatory victimization happens when students are targeted because of their color, ethnicity, religion, gender, or disability, which exacerbates social inequities and emotional distress (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Finally, criminal victimization encompasses more serious offenses such as robbery, physical assault, or other crimes committed on school grounds, resulting in a dangerous learning environment (NCES, 2022). Each type of victimization has unique characteristics and consequences, but they often overlap and can co-occur, exacerbating the harm experienced by victims.

Victimization include one-time incidents or less organized forms of harm whereas bullying is characterized by intentionality and persistence. Peer victimization is a specific type of victimization occurring among students of similar age or status, emphasizing the relational aspect. It frequently involves peer relations and may include bullying, social isolation, and harassment. Victimization, on the other hand, can occur in a variety of settings, such as teacher-student interactions or school-wide systemic concerns (Olweus, 1996; Gredler, 2003).

Victimization in schools is a widespread issue that has received significant attention from scholars, educators, and mental health experts around the world. School victimization, as defined widely, includes a wide range of behaviors, from verbal scorn and social exclusion to physical aggression and internet harassment (Smith et al. 2002). According to research, such experiences have a significant impact on adolescents' psychological well-being, social interactions, and academic engagement. Victimization among school-aged adolescents is a widespread issue that affects their psychological, social, and intellectual development (Due et al., 2005).

Global research have shown that victimization increases the risk of anxiety, sadness, low self-esteem, and school avoidance (Glew et al., 2005; Reijntjes et al., 2010). Exclusion from social networks can exacerbate emotions of isolation and worthlessness (Salmivalli, 2010). Teacher responses have a substantial impact on these dynamics; Wang and Degol (2016) argue that classroom climates characterized by teacher partiality or indifference can foster bullying cultures.

In recent decades, the digital domain has developed as a new source of peer victimization. Tokunaga (2010) observes that social media platforms compound humiliation, making it more public and difficult to flee, often exacerbating the psychological impact.

Victimization in South Asia and Pakistan

Bullying has developed as a major concern in Pakistan, with new bullying customs swiftly gaining popularity. Shujja and Atta (2014) evaluated the prevalence of victimization, bullying, and fighting behavior among students in relation to gender, school type, and graduation. Adolescents are a major demographic in Pakistan, accounting for approximately 64% of the population under the age of 30 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). High school teenagers in Pakistan experience unique challenges, including high rates of peer victimization, insufficient mental health facilities, and sociocultural variables that exacerbate psychological distress. Victimization, defined as being targeted for violence, assault, or exclusion by peers, is a widespread issue in Pakistani schools (Malik & Ajmal, 2018).

While the phenomenon is well-documented in Western contexts, there is a scarcity of in-depth qualitative studies from South Asia that explore the subjective experiences of victimized students. In Pakistan, most research on school problems focuses on academic performance or physical punishment (Shaukat et al., 2014). The complex socio-cultural elements influencing peer victimization, such as caste hierarchy, economic gaps, and instructor bias, have received little attention.

Gaps and Rationale

The combination of poverty, established social inequality, and underfunded schools may have a particular impact on victimization patterns in south punjab. However, local voices are notably lacking in the literature. This study aims to fill this gap by using a phenomenological approach to record the lived experiences of victimization as narrated by parents, teachers and high school students providing indirect but culturally rich insights into the daily issues that high school children encounter.

Objectives

1. Examine high school students' experiences with victimization.
2. Identify the social, psychological, and academic repercussions of victimization.
3. Investigate how classmates, teachers, families, and digital platforms contribute to ongoing victimization.

METHOD

Design

A phenomenological qualitative design was used to investigate the meaning structures and essence of victimization experiences among high school students, as told by the participants. This approach is appropriate for eliciting participants' subjective, contextual realities, and is consistent with Creswell's (2013) emphasis on lived experience.

Participants and Sampling

This qualitative study used a phenomenological methodology to investigate the lived experiences of high school students who have been victimized in school settings. A total of 30 participants were recruited, including high school students (grades 9-10), parents, and teachers. Purposive sampling was used to ensure diversity in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, caste background, and school type. Three independent focus group discussions (FGDs) were held, one with each student, parent, and teacher. Participants were identified through school records, referrals from school counselors, and community networks to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives related to victimization.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were included based on the following criteria: (1) students enrolled in private and public high schools in South Punjab and aged between 13-18 years; (2) parents of students who had reported victimization experiences within the last academic year; (3) teachers with at least three years of teaching experience at the secondary school level and familiarity with student social dynamics. All participants were required to be fluent in Urdu and willing to share their experiences in a group setting.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded if they (1) were unwilling to provide informed consent; (2) had been diagnosed with cognitive, developmental, or learning disabilities, as these may have introduced confounding variables not central to the study's focus on peer victimization.

Measures

Two tools were used to facilitate data collection: an interview guide and a demographic questionnaire. The semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researchers based on relevant literature and validated qualitative research tools. It included open-ended questions addressing the types of victimization experienced, the roles of peers and teachers, emotional and academic consequences, and perceptions of school authority. The demographic questionnaire was designed to collect basic information such as age, gender, occupation, school role (student, parent, or teacher), and years of experience (for teachers and parents).

Interview Guide

The interview guide consisted of 15 open-ended questions about types of victimization observed, Children's psychological and academic responses, Peer group dynamics, Teachers' roles and reactions, Family discussions about school experiences, Impact of social media including prompts such as: "What types of teasing or bullying are common in your school?", "How do students who are victimized react emotionally or academically?", "How do teachers handle such situations?", and "Have online platforms been used to harass or mock students?" Follow-up questions were used to probe deeper into participants' responses and gather richer data.

Focus group discussion

Participants were carefully recruited with similar type of people. The environment was comfortable, circle seating and tape recorded. Theme were generated on the base of focus group discussion. The creation of the item pool was the result of three focused group discussions based on the literature research. To guarantee variety, volunteers were chosen from Urban, semi-urban, and rural schools diverse socioeconomic origins. Focus groups ranged in size from eight to ten people. To ensure that experiences were representative, a purposive sample technique was used to recruit individuals from a variety of backgrounds. First focus group participants were 13 to 18 years old and enrolled in grades 9 & 10 at several public and private schools in Muzaffargarh, Multan, Layyah, and Dera Ghazi Khan. Other two focus group discussion participants were High School Teachers and Educational Psychologists. The concentrated group's members were exceptionally skilled. There were open-ended questions posed. Each session lasted approximately 40–60 minutes. The narrowly focused group discussions helped to clarify the concept. Focused group discussions were conducted to determine the final items' appropriateness, applicability, and response type in relation to the main topics. To promote comfort and openness, each FGD was moderated by a trained qualitative researcher fluent in Urdu and the local dialects (Saraiki and Punjabi). A co-moderator took detailed notes and managed the recording equipment. Participants' responses to the targeted discussion questions exposed Verbal, Physical, Relational, cyberbullying, and authority driven victimization in high schools. 67 items were produced with the assistance of focus group discussion.

All FGDs were audio recorded with the participants' permission and then transcribed verbatim in Urdu. Transcripts were evaluated using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to uncover reoccurring themes, behaviors, and culturally distinctive victimization manifestations.

Procedure

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted separately with three distinct groups: teachers, parents, and high school students in neutral and comfortable settings to ensure open, respectful, and honest sharing. Each FGD included 10 participants, making a total of 30 participants in the study. Before beginning, participants were greeted, educated about the study's objectives, and asked to sign informed consent forms. The moderator kicked off the discussion, established ground rules for confidentiality and respect, and then managed the session with the interview guide. Each FGD lasted about 60-90 minutes. Sessions were audio recorded with participants' permission, and relevant observations were captured in field notes.

The first focus group discussion (FGD) involved ten high school teachers from public schools in South Punjab. Prior to the conversation, informed agreement was sought from the school principals, and formal invitations were delivered to all selected teachers, including the date, time, and location. The session began with the researcher giving a brief introduction and explaining the study's aims. An interview guide was supplied to the participants to outline the conversation topics and enable focused dialogue. A certified moderator led the discussion, ensuring equal participation and a comfortable conversational environment. The debate lasted 60 to 90 minutes, and all comments were audio-recorded with the participants' approval.

The second focus group discussion (FGD) included ten parents of high school students who reported or were considered to have experienced school-based victimization. Participants were found using school records and community recommendations. Consent forms were distributed in advance, and formal invitations were mailed to confirm participation. The researcher began the session by discussing its goal and ethical considerations. Each parent was given an interview guide to help them follow the discussion flow. A skilled moderator led the discussion, encouraging all parents to offer their viewpoints. The session ran for 60-90 minutes, with detailed notes and audio recordings collected for analysis.

The third FGD was conducted with 10 students currently enrolled in grades 9 and 10 in public high schools. These students were purposively selected based on teacher and counselor reports indicating exposure to victimization. Parental consent and student assent were obtained before participation. Invitations were issued with session details, and the discussion was held in a familiar, student-friendly environment. After an introductory briefing by the researcher and distribution of the interview guide, the trained moderator facilitated the conversation, using age-appropriate language and prompts to ensure clarity and comfort. The FGD lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, with participants' confidentiality and privacy strictly maintained during the audio recording and note-taking process.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured, participants were informed they could withdraw at any time without consequence and ethical approval was secured from the relevant institutional board. Parental consent and student assent were obtained separately for participants under 18. No identifying information was used in data transcription or reporting.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. Transcripts were read multiple times for familiarization, and initial codes were generated manually. Codes were then grouped into potential themes, which were reviewed, refined, and named. Themes were finalized through team discussions, and illustrative quotes were selected to support each theme.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability, the coding process was repeated by a second independent researcher. Reliability was strengthened through iterative coding and periodic peer checks, achieving an agreement reliability score above 0.85, which surpasses recommended qualitative thresholds (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001). The validity of the themes was ensured through triangulation of perspectives (students, parents, and teachers), prolonged engagement with the data, and member checking, where selected participants reviewed the thematic interpretations for accuracy and resonance with their experiences.

Emergent Themes from the Data

The phenomenological analysis of the focus group discussions revealed 14 interconnected themes related to the victimization experiences of high school students in South Punjab. These themes reflect a spectrum of physical, psychological, social, digital, and institutional victimization, deeply rooted in peer dynamics, teacher behaviors, family environments, and structural inequalities.

T1. Mocking Names and Labeling

One of the most commonly reported forms of peer victimization was verbal abuse through mocking, teasing, and labeling. Students were targeted for their physical appearance, family background, economic status, or minor mistakes. For example, a child was called “monkey” by classmates when he opened his lunch, leading to emotional withdrawal. This kind of name-calling, as Smith et al. (2002) argue, is a core form of relational aggression that undermines self-worth and becomes normalized in school culture.

“As soon as the child opened the lunch, the children started saying ‘monkey monkey,’ so next time he didn’t bring the Banana in lunch.”

T2. Social Exclusion and Group Dynamics

Students were often excluded from peer groups based on intelligence, gender, age, or behavior. Being perceived as “different” resulted in social isolation, diminished classroom participation, and emotional distress. This reflects findings by Salmivalli (2010), who emphasized the role of peer groups in reinforcing inclusion and exclusion dynamics, often leading to bullying.

“The less intelligent children are removed from the group because they do not understand anything, so what is the reason?”

T3. Physical Victimization and Property Damage

Physical victimization emerged in the form of covert and overt aggression: pushing, dropping ink on belongings, and damaging or hiding others’ possessions. This type of behavior served as both intimidation and a way to express jealousy or dominance. Card and Hodges (2008) noted the co-occurrence of physical and relational aggression in escalating peer conflict.

“Some children push each other. They drop ink on each other or hide things because they cannot bear that someone has it.”

T4. Retaliation and Cycles of Aggression

Victimized students sometimes became aggressors themselves by engaging in revenge behaviors damaging peers' items, spreading rumors, or socially excluding others. Espelage and Holt (2001) highlight how students can alternate between the roles of victim and perpetrator, creating cycles of aggression.

“They break it or hide it because they cannot bear that they have that thing and we don't.”

T5. Psychological Distress and Withdrawal

Sustained victimization led to symptoms of anxiety, depression, and avoidance. Some students avoided bringing favorite food, withdrew socially, or even refused to attend school. Glew et al. (2005) found similar links between peer victimization and psychological distress, which negatively impact academic engagement.

“The child became depressed and disturbed... didn’t take the banana to lunch again.”

T6. Teacher Bias and Academic Discrimination

Teachers were reported to favor students who took private tuition or offered gifts, while neglecting or punishing economically disadvantaged students. Such biases institutionalized inequality and exacerbated peer victimization. This aligns with Hughes et al. (2001) and Yoon & Bauman (2014), who found that teacher favoritism can intensify peer conflicts.

“Teachers reward those who give gifts... and ignore others completely.”

T7. Revenge Dynamics and Escalation

Retaliation was not limited to peers; in some cases, students involved siblings or parents to settle school disputes, escalating conflicts beyond the classroom. Card and Hodges (2008) observed similar patterns of retaliatory aggression leading to broader social consequences.

“If someone fights with them, they bring their older brother or involve their family members.”

T8. Teacher’s Role in Perpetuating or Reducing Victimization

Teacher sometimes directly humiliated students in front of peers or failed to address bullying, thereby normalizing such behaviors. Favoritism based on tuition or social class reinforced inequality. Wang and Degol (2016) emphasized how teacher behavior significantly influences the classroom climate and peer norms.

“The teachers take revenge on the children because of their problems... they should treat all children the same.”

T9. Digital / Cyber Victimization

Participants reported that bullying extended to digital spaces through WhatsApp statuses, Facebook posts, and mocking emojis. Tokunaga (2010) stressed that cyberbullying increases the psychological impact of victimization due to its permanence and wide reach.

“They put status on WhatsApp to target someone so he becomes sad.”

T10. Economic & Caste Disparities

Victimization was also rooted in social and economic hierarchies. Students from poor families or lower caste backgrounds were ridiculed, deepening structural marginalization. Espelage and Holt (2001) highlighted that socioeconomic disparities often act as triggers for peer aggression.

“They say, ‘your father is so poor he doesn’t even have a bicycle’—children feel very bad.”

T11. Gender Segregation and Peer Formation

Boys and girls formed rigid, exclusive groups and often mocked or excluded members of the opposite gender. Younger or older students were similarly isolated. Salmivalli (2010) explains how peer group structures contribute to sustained bullying behaviors.

“Boys only stay with boys, girls with girls... they don’t let others join them.”

T12. School Avoidance and Academic Decline

Due to constant fear of ridicule, some students avoided school, stopped participating in class, or dropped out altogether. Glew et al. (2005) found that victimization contributes to academic failure, absenteeism, and disengagement.

“He doesn’t want to go to school anymore... he says ‘they’ll make fun of me again.’”

T13. Family Modeling of Aggression

Aggressive behavior at school often mirrored patterns at home. Children exposed to abusive language or conflict in their families were more likely to engage in similar behaviors with peers. Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory supports this, stating that children replicate modeled behaviors observed in their environment.

“His parents fight all the time and use bad words... he does the same in school.”

T14. Loss of Trust in Authority

When teachers failed to act fairly or protect victims, students lost trust in them and began hiding problems or retaliating independently. Yoon and Bauman (2014) emphasized that teacher responses shape students’ willingness to seek help and influence overall school safety.

“When teachers don’t listen, the children keep it inside... or take revenge themselves.”

FINDINGS

Thematic Table of Victimization among High School students

Theme Code	Theme & Linked theories/ Reference	Subthemes Illustrations	Description
T1	Mocking Names, Labeling, Verbal Abuse (Smith et al., 2002)	Name-calling(e.g., “monkey”), family/caste	Students are ridiculed by peers using insulting names tied to looks, social class, or minor behaviors.
T2	Social Exclusion & Group Dynamics (Salmivalli, 2010)	In- Exclusion intelligence, age, gender	by Children who differ in intellect or personality are often isolated from peer groups, harming belonging.
T3	Physical Victimization & Property Damage (Card & Hodges, 2008)	Pushing, dropping ink, & hiding/breaking belongings	Victimization also involves covert and overt physical acts, damaging peer trust and safety.
T4	Retaliation & Aggression Cycles (Espelage & Holt, 2001)	Revenge acts (e.g., hiding items) victimized students	(e.g., Victims sometimes retaliate, creating by ongoing cycles of aggression and reinforcing a hostile climate.
T5	Psychological Distress & Withdrawal (Glew et al., 2005)	Avoiding lunch, school, emotional anxiety, and disturbance	Repeated victimization leads to depression, and withdrawal from social and academic life.

Theme Code	Theme & Linked theories/ Reference	Subthemes Illustrations	Description
T6	Teacher's Normalization or Protection (Wang & Degol, 2016)	Role: Public favoritism tied to tuition/gifts	scolding, Teachers may unintentionally legitimize bullying by humiliating or favoring certain students.
T7	Revenge Dynamics & Escalation (Card & Hodges, 2008)	Escalating feuds among students and families	Disputes sometimes involve families or intensify into broader conflicts beyond school walls.
T8	Teacher Bias & Academic Favoritism (Yoon & Bauman, 2014)	Favoritism to tuition students, gifts, family ties	Academic victimization occurs when teachers give better marks or treatment based on external benefits.
T9	Social Media Victimization (Tokunaga, 2010)	Amplifying WhatsApp statuses, Facebook comments, emoji mocking	Victimization extends into digital spaces, amplifying psychological harm through public ridicule.
T10	Economic & Caste Disparities (Espelage & Holt, 2001)	Ridicule tied to poverty or caste remarks	Peers use socio-economic or caste differences to humiliate and socially marginalize victims.
T11	Gender Segregation & Peer Grouping (Salmivalli, 2010)	Boys vs. girls groups, age-based clustering	Peer groups often form along gender or age lines, increasing risks of excluding "outsiders."
T12	School Avoidance & Academic Decline (Glew et al., 2005)	Leaving school, losing interest in studies	Prolonged victimization contributes to school dropout risks and academic disengagement.
T13	Family Modeling of Aggression (Bandura, 1977)	Home use of abusive language replicated at school	Family environments with conflicts or verbal abuse teach children similar behaviors at school.
T14	Loss of Trust in Authority Figures (Yoon & Bauman, 2014)	Not reporting to teachers due to bias or mishandling	When teachers fail to intervene fairly, victims stop reporting, intensifying silent suffering.

DISCUSSION

These themes highlight a multi-layered problem where victimization extends beyond individual children to systemic biases involving families, teachers, and technology. The combination of socioeconomic background, teacher practices, and peer culture contributes to ongoing victimization. The findings highlight the importance of teacher training, parental understanding, and school rules that actively oppose any forms of discrimination or ridicule.

This phenomenological study looked into the diverse victimization experiences of high school pupils in South Punjab, uncovering fourteen interconnected themes. These findings add to our understanding of how victimization is more than just an individual or isolated issue; it is embedded in peer dynamics, educational practices, home surroundings, and digital contexts.

The prevalence of ridiculing names, labeling, and verbal abuse (T1) demonstrates how derision based on physical appearance, socioeconomic status, or minor differences is a common element of peer relationships. According to Smith et al. (2002), such humiliation erodes self-esteem and creates a climate in which bullying becomes acceptable. The themes of social exclusion and in-group dynamics (T2) and

gender or age-based grouping (T11) highlight how victimization frequently occurs through subtle peer structures, echoing Salmivalli's (2010) findings on how peer groups manage inclusion and exclusion.

Furthermore, physical victimization and property damage (T3), as well as retribution cycles (T4, T7), show that aggressiveness is commonly reciprocated, resulting in long-term hostile climates (Espelage & Holt 2001). The psychological ramifications were tremendous. The study revealed psychological discomfort and withdrawal (T5), as well as school avoidance leading to academic decline (T12), which are consistent with Glew et al. (2005), who relate victimization to poor mental health and educational disengagement.

Importantly, teacher behavior (T6, T8) was identified as both a risk and protective factor. Yoon and Bauman (2014) found that teachers occasionally reinforced detrimental dynamics by prioritizing students who paid their tuition or hailed from influential families. This increases distrust in authoritative persons (T14), causing children to internalize their misery. New complexity emerged in cyber victimization (T9), as WhatsApp statuses, Facebook remarks, and emoji-based mocking expanded the scope of peer victimization outside school grounds (Tokunaga, 2010). The combination of economic and caste differences (T10) shows that victimization is structurally based, reflecting global studies on social inequalities as bullying causes (Espelage & Holt, 2001).

Finally, the influence of family modeling of aggressiveness (T13) shows that hostile home conditions frequently prolong cycles of peer victimization, which is consistent with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that victimization among high school students in South Punjab is a complex phenomenon that is inextricably linked to peer hierarchies, teaching practices, familial modeling, and internet platforms. It goes beyond the simplistic concepts of "bully and victim," revealing a complex ecology of relational aggression, institutional prejudices, and psychological suffering. The study identified 14 interconnected themes that reflect the social, emotional, intellectual, and structural components of victimization, including name-calling, physical aggression, peer exclusion, internet harassment, teacher bias, and family impact. These data show that victimization is not limited to single episodes, but is profoundly ingrained in school culture, teacher-student relationships, peer hierarchies, and larger social structures like caste and economic class.

Students' emotional withdrawal, academic disengagement, and lack of faith in authoritative figures highlight the devastating psychological repercussions of unchecked mistreatment. Furthermore, the involvement of teachers and families in promoting or moderating these behaviors suggests that interventions should be holistic and context-based. The rise of cyberbullying as a major subtheme emphasizes the critical need to extend awareness and preventative efforts into digital areas.

To summarize, addressing school victimization needs more than just disciplinary policies; it necessitates a shift in school culture that encourages empathy, equity, and psychological safety for all kids. Interventions require collaboration among all stakeholders' students, teachers, parents, and policymakers to create supportive, inclusive learning environments. This study lays the groundwork for future research and practice aimed at reducing school-based victimization in Pakistan and other culturally similar environments.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have important practical consequences for educational policy, school administration, teacher training, and mental health support in Pakistani schools. First, the multifaceted character of victimization revealed in this study comprising verbal, physical, social, and digital manifestations necessitates the development of comprehensive anti-bullying programs in schools. School leaders must ensure that all kids, regardless of caste, socioeconomic status, or academic standing, feel equally safe. Second, teacher training programs should include modules on recognizing, treating, and preventing student victimization, with a focus on removing unconscious bias and partiality. Third, the study emphasizes the significance of creating school-based psychiatric services or counselor positions where children can report incidences without fear of retaliation. Fourth, the function of digital safety education must be expanded to combat the growing prevalence of cyber victimization on platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook.

LIMITATIONS

While this study provides valuable contextual information, it has significant drawbacks. First, the data were gathered through focus group talks that included indirect reporting by parents and teachers, which may not accurately reflect the students' personal emotional experiences. Although students took part, cultural norms and group dynamics may have hampered their openness during the sessions. Second, the study was geographically limited to specific areas in South Punjab, limiting the findings' applicability to other parts of Pakistan with distinct socio-cultural or educational characteristics. Furthermore, the study's qualitative style stresses depth over breadth, thus the insights, while significant, may not represent the full sweep of victimization practices in Pakistani schools. Finally, self-selection bias could have occurred, as participants who volunteered for the survey may have had stronger opinions or more extreme experiences than those who did not.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future study should try to record students' personal narratives through individual interviews in order to gain deeper emotional and psychological insights into their victimization experiences. Comparative studies of urban and rural school settings may indicate how context determines the forms and consequences of school victimization. There is also a need to create and validate indigenous psychometric measures to assess victimization experiences in Pakistan's sociocultural setting. In addition, longitudinal studies could investigate the long-term impact of victimization on students' academic and mental health outcomes. Finally, intervention-based research could test the effectiveness of school-wide anti-bullying programs and teacher sensitization workshops in reducing incidents of victimization and improving school climate.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Crick, N. R., & Grotpeter, J. K. (1995). Relational aggression, gender, and social-psychological adjustment. *Child development*, 66(3), 710-722.
- Due, P., et al. (2005). Bullying and symptoms among school-aged children. *JAMA*, 293(12), 1541-1548.
- Espelage, D. L., & Holt, M. K. (2001). Bullying and victimization during adolescence. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2, 123–142.

- Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2003). Research on school bullying and victimization: What have we learned and where do we go from here?. *School psychology review*, 32(3), 365-383.
- Finkelhor, D., & Dzuiba-Leatherman, J. (1994). Victimization of children. *American psychologist*, 49(3), 173.
- Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormrod, R., & Hamby, S. L. (2009). Violence, abuse, and crime exposure in a national sample of children and youth. *Pediatrics*, 124(5), 1411-1423.
- Glew, G. M., et al. (2005). Bullying, psychosocial adjustment, and academic performance. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 159, 1026–1031.
- Gredler, G. R. (2003). Olweus, D.(1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 140 pp., \$25.00. *Psychology in the Schools*, 40(6).
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2008). Cyberbullying: An exploratory analysis of factors related to offending and victimization. *Deviant behavior*, 29(2), 129-156.
- Hughes, J.N., et al. (2001). Influence of teacher and peer support on students' psychological adjustment. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(1), 102–110.
- Juvonen, J., & Graham, S. (2014). Bullying in schools. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65, 159–185.
- Koss, M. P., Gidycz, C. A., & Wisniewski, N. (1987). The scope of rape: incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 55(2), 162.
- Kowalski, R.M., et al. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: A critical review. *Psychology Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073–1137.
- Malik, F., & Ajmal, A. (2018). Bullying in Pakistani schools: A qualitative study. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 33(1), 123-140.
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2022). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*.
- Olweus, D. (1996). *The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim, Questionnaire*. Bergen, Norway: University of Bergen.
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Pakistan Demographic Survey 2023*. Government of Pakistan.
- Patterson, G.R., et al. (1992). A developmental model for antisocial behavior. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(4), 703–718.
- Payne, B. K., & Gainey, R. R. (2006). The criminal justice response to elder abuse in nursing homes: A routine activities perspective. *Western Criminology Review*, 7(3).
- Reijntjes, A., et al. (2010). Peer victimization and internalizing problems. *Child Development*, 81(6), 1781–1802.
- Salmivalli, C. (2010). Bullying and the peer group. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 15, 112–120.
- Shujja, S., Atta, M., & Shujjat, J. M. (2014). Prevalence of bullying and victimization among sixth graders with reference to gender, socio-economic status and type of schools. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(2), 159-165.

- Smith, P.K., et al. (2002). Definitions of bullying: A comparison of terms. *Child Development*, 73(3), 707–720.
- Tokunaga, R. S. (2010). Cyberbullying: A critical review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26, 277–287.
- Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. L. (2016). School climate. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28, 315–352.
- Yoon, J. S., & Bauman, S. (2014). Teachers' role in bullying prevention. *Theory Into Practice*, 53, 308–314.